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PUBLIC UTILITIES COMM.
STATE OF CALIF.

1954 MAY 10 PM 4:25

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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3557

MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR IOWA JCT., LA., ON

FEBRUARY 12, 1954

SUMMARY

Date: February 12, 1954

Railroad: Missouri Pacific

Location: Iowa Jct., La.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck

Train number: 890 :

Engine number: Diesel-electric :
units 4266 and
4270

Consist: 43 cars, caboose :

Estimated speeds: 40 m. p. h. : 40 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; level

Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle of
56°22'; level

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:05 a. m.

Casualties: 3 killed

Cause: Motor-truck occupying rail-highway
grade crossing immediately in front
of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3557

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

March 10, 1954

Accident near Iowa Jct., La., on February 12, 1954, caused
by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade
crossing immediately in front of an approaching
train.

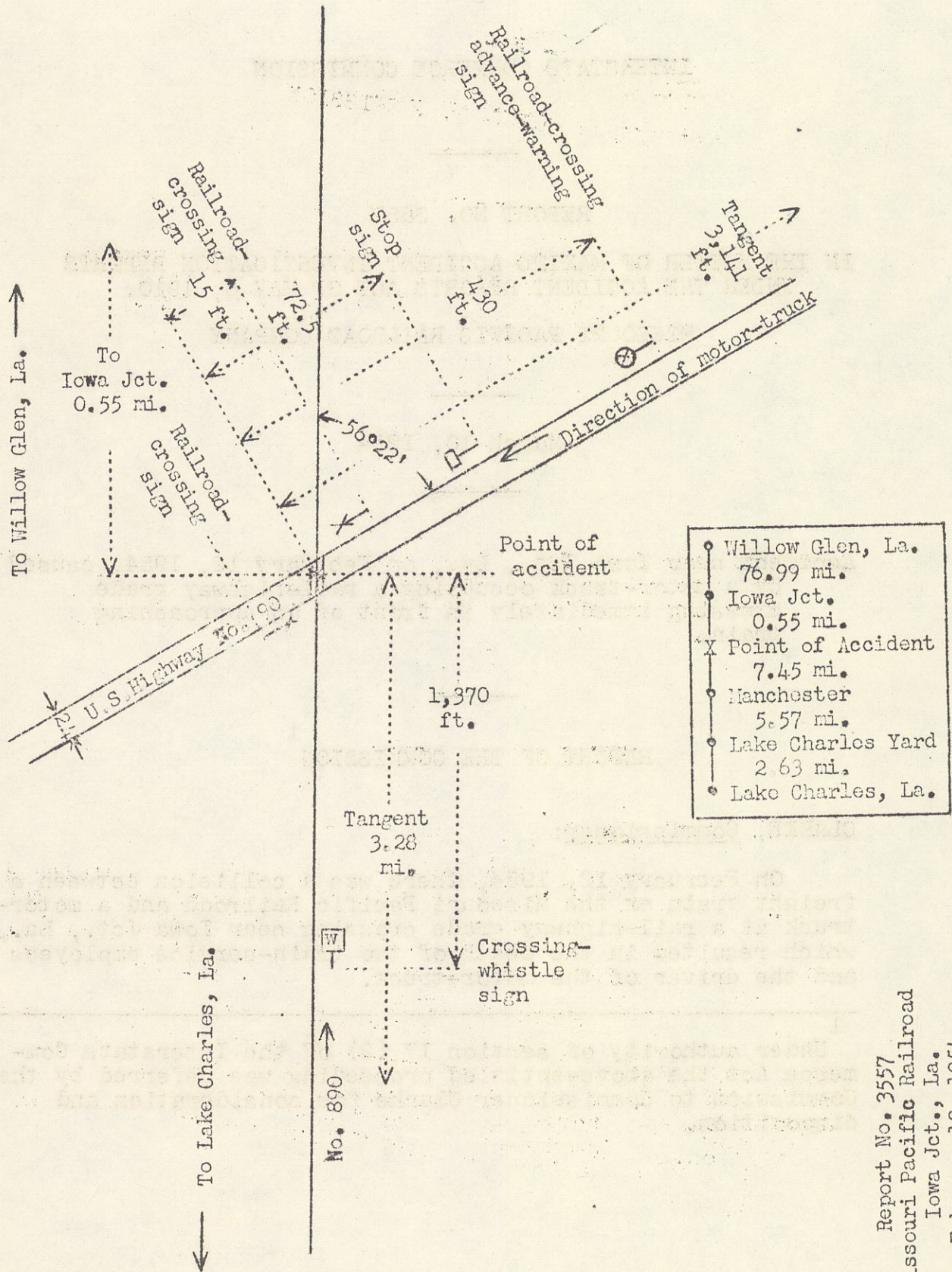
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On February 12, 1954, there was a collision between a freight train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad and a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing near Iowa Jct., La., which resulted in the death of two train-service employees and the driver of the motor-truck.

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Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3557
Missouri Pacific Railroad
Iowa Jct., La.
February 12, 1954

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the DeQuincy Division extending between Lake Charles and Willow Glen, La., 93.19 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 15.65 miles east of Lake Charles and 0.55 mile west of Iowa Jct., at the point where the railroad is crossed at grade by U. S. Highway No. 90. In this vicinity the railroad extends from northeast to southwest. The highway extends from east to west. Timetable directions on the railroad are east and west, and these directions are used in this report. The railroad is tangent throughout a distance of 3.28 miles immediately west of the point of accident and 0.91 mile eastward. The grade is practically level. The southeast angle of the intersection of the railroad and U. S. Highway No. 90 is $56^{\circ}22'$. The highway is 24 feet in width and is surfaced with bituminous material. It is tangent throughout a distance of 3,141 feet immediately south of the crossing and a considerable distance northward. At the crossing a 4-inch by 10-inch timber is laid on each side of each rail. The remaining area of the crossing is filled with bituminous material. The surface of the crossing is level with the tops of the rails. The highway is practically level throughout a considerable distance on each side of the crossing.

A circular railroad-crossing advance-warning sign 30 inches in diameter is located 21 feet east of the center-line of the highway and 430 feet south of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast 4 feet above the level of the highway. It bears two diagonal lines intersecting at right angles and the letters "RR" in black on a yellow background. A sign bearing the words "STOP" and "Louisiana Law", in red on a white background, is located 25 feet east of the center-line of the highway and 72 feet 6 inches south of the track. This sign is 3 feet 4 inches high and 4 feet 2 inches wide. It is mounted on a mast 10 feet above the level of the highway. A flashing-light warning signal is located 20 feet east of the center-line of the highway and 15 feet south of the center-line of the track. This signal is provided with two hooded red lights mounted back-to-back at each end of a horizontal bar which is mounted on a mast approximately 8 feet above the level of the highway. The warning aspect is displayed by the alternate illumination of these lights and by the continuous illumination of the word "STOP" in

red letters below the lights. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign which bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING", in black on a white background, is mounted on the same mast 11 feet 6 inches above the level of the highway. A similar signal is located in the northwest angle of the intersection. The control circuits are so arranged that both signals automatically display warning aspects when an east-bound train is occupying any portion of the track throughout a distance of 1,584 feet immediately west of the crossing. A crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains is located 1,370 feet west of the crossing.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Horn or Whistle Signals. * * *

NOTE.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds. * * *

Sound.

Indication.

* * *

(1) — — o — —

Approaching public crossings at grade. (Standard sign will designate point at which signal must begin.) To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is occupied by engine or car. * * *

* * *

17. Headlights.--The standard white headlight must be displayed brightly to the front of every train by day and by night.

* * *

30. Ringing Bell. * * * the engine bell must be rung * * * while approaching and passing public crossings at grade * * *

Laws of the State of Louisiana read in part as follows:

Sec. 244. Vehicles transporting explosives or inflammables

* * * the owner or operator of a vehicle transporting inflammable liquids shall not, except where he is protected by a flagman then on duty, cross any railroad without coming to a full stop, before reaching it, in such manner and for such time as to make certain that no train or other facility is approaching. * * *

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 45 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 890, an east-bound third-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 4266 and 4270, coupled in multiple-unit control, 43 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from Manchester, 7.45 miles west of the point of accident, at 8:50 a. m., 1 hour 20 minutes late, and while it was moving at an estimated speed of about 40 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing 15.65 miles east of Lake Charles and 0.55 mile west of Iowa Jct.

The vehicle involved was a tractor and semi-trailer owned by the Taussig Oil Company, Inc., Lake Charles, La. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held Louisiana chauffeur's license No. 31637-S. The tractor was a 1953 model eight-cylinder Ford. It was equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels and with both mechanical and air brakes. It bore 1953 Louisiana license No. 130688. The semi-trailer, which bore 1953 Louisiana license No. 411.121, consisted of a 6000-gallon Heil tank mounted on tandem axles. Dual tires were provided on the wheels. It was equipped with air brakes. The total length of the tractor and semi-trailer was 46 feet. At the time of the accident the cargo consisted of 5,940 gallons of Ethyl gasoline. The cargo was loaded at Abbeville, La., and was to be delivered in Lake Charles. This vehicle was moving northward on U. S. Highway No. 90 at an estimated speed of about 40 miles per hour when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by No. 890.

The rear truck of the first Diesel-electric unit of No. 890 was derailed at the crossing. This truck continued in line with the track, and the train stopped with the front of the locomotive 1,156 feet east of the point of accident. No other unit of the train was derailed. The front end of the first Diesel-electric unit was damaged in the collision. Gasoline escaping from the tank of the semi-trailer became ignited, and the first Diesel-electric unit was badly damaged and the second Diesel-electric unit was somewhat damaged by fire. The train stopped with the twenty-third car on the crossing. The twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second cars were destroyed, the twenty-third car was badly damaged, and the nineteenth and the twenty-fourth cars were slightly damaged by fire.

The semi-trailer was struck approximately 7 feet back of the front end. The tractor and the front portion of the semi-trailer stopped in the northeast angle of the intersection. The rear portion of the semi-trailer stopped in the southeast angle of the intersection. The semi-trailer was demolished in the collision, and the tractor was destroyed in the ensuing fire.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 890 and the driver of the motor-truck were killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 9:05 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the crossing was 5.9 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 p. m., February 13, 1954, 4,307 automobiles, 641 trucks, 40 buses, and 2 other vehicles passed over the crossing.

Diesel-electric units 4266 and 4270 are of the road-switcher type. Each unit is equipped with 24-RL brake equipment and with a safety-control feature actuated by a foot pedal.

Discussion

As No. 890 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were on the first Diesel-electric unit, the front brakeman and the swing brakeman were in the control compartment of the second Diesel-electric unit, the conductor was in the caboose, and the flagman was in the cupola of the

caboose. The brakes of the train had been tested at Lake Charles Yard, 2.63 miles east of Lake Charles, and again at Manchester after cars were added to the train at that point. The front brakeman and the swing brakeman said that the grade-crossing whistle signal was sounded as the train approached the crossing where the accident occurred. The members of the train crew estimated that the speed at this time was between 35 and 45 miles per hour. As the train closely approached the crossing the swing brakeman and the flagman observed the motor-truck approaching on the highway. They thought the truck was moving at approximately the same speed as the train. When the swing brakeman saw that there was a possibility of a collision he sounded additional warning signals on the pneumatic horn of the second Diesel-electric unit. He said that there appeared to be no reduction in the speed of the truck before the collision occurred. Both the swing brakeman and the flagman said that an emergency brake application became effective immediately before the locomotive struck the truck.

A witness to the accident said that he was driving northward on the highway and was about 1/4 mile behind the motor-truck when the accident occurred. He said that he saw the approaching train and witnessed the accident, but he did not know whether the flashing-light warning signals were in operation or whether the grade-crossing whistle signal was sounded. Two witnesses who were north of the crossing said that the flashing-light warning signals were operating properly as the train approached. One of these witnesses said that he saw the truck approaching and that the driver did not swerve or make any apparent attempt to avoid the collision. This witness did not know whether the grade-crossing whistle signal was sounded. The other witness said that the whistle signal was sounded. None of the witnesses noticed whether the headlight of the locomotive was lighted.

The signal maintainer said that he last inspected the warning signals at the crossing 2 days before the accident occurred and that the signals were operating properly at that time. The signal in the southeast angle of the intersection was demolished when the collision occurred. The instrument case and cables were destroyed by fire.

The laws of the State of Louisiana provide that a vehicle transporting inflammable liquids must not cross a railroad at a crossing not protected by a flagman until after the vehicle

has been stopped and the driver has assured himself that no train is approaching. The driver of the motor-truck was killed, and it is not known why he failed to stop before entering the crossing. Throughout a distance of 3,141 feet immediately south of the crossing, the driver of a north-bound vehicle has an unobstructed view of an approaching east-bound train throughout a distance of over 3 miles immediately west of the crossing.

Cause

This accident was caused by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this tenth day of March, 1954.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,

Secretary.